

the help of the United Nations and other international partners to eradicate slavery and the conditions that precipitate it.

Thank you.
I yield back.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to speak to an issue that I have spoken to many times on the floor of the Senate. It is the issue of the DREAM Act, a measure which I introduced in the Senate 16 years ago.

Sixteen years ago I tried to find a way to give young people brought into the United States, who grew up here in this country but did not have legal status, a chance—just a chance—to earn their way to legal status, to earn their way to citizenship. We set a number of hurdles in their path. We made it clear that they had to complete their education. We made it clear that they had to pass a serious criminal background check. We gave a timetable when they would be able to reach legal status and not fear deportation.

That was 16 years ago, and it still is not the law of the land. Unfortunately, there are hundreds of thousands of young people who fit the description that I have just given.

When President Obama was in the White House, I wrote him a letter and said: Mr. President, can you do something to help them? And he did. He created something called DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It was an Executive order that said to these young people: If you fit that definition of the DREAM Act and if you will come forward and pay a filing fee of \$500 or more, if you will submit yourself to a criminal background check and give us all of your background information about you and your family, then, we will give you temporary, renewable status to stay in America, not be deported, and be allowed to work.

It was a big leap for many of these young people to do it because they had grown up in families where, in whispered conversations in the evening, their parents told them: Be careful. If you get arrested and they come to see this family, many of us will be forced to leave this country. Be careful.

These young people decided to trust the President of the United States, to trust the Government of the United States, and to run the risk of disclosing everything—giving the most sensitive, personal information about themselves and about their families. They trusted us, and they trusted this country to treat them fairly and justly.

So 780,000 have come forward. They submitted their filing fees. They paid for the expenses of the government. They did it knowing that even with this new status—this DACA status under President Obama's Executive order—they didn't qualify for one penny of Federal Government benefits,

and by working, they would be forced to pay taxes, which they were glad to do. Again, 780,000 came forward.

Then came the last election—the election of a President of the United States who had made immigration the centerpiece of his election message and who had really sewn doubt, and even fear, about allowing immigrants into our Nation of immigrants. It is not a new message in America. It is hardly a new message around the world. Being suspicious and fearful, even hateful, of immigrants has been a part of human experience from the beginning of time.

So what would happen to these DACA-protected 780,000 young people? President Trump announced, through his Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, on September 5 of this year, that DACA protection was ending. As of March 5 of next year, 2018, no one could sign up for DACA protection, and as the protection expired for each of them, there was no renewal for 780,000 young people.

The President then challenged Congress and said: Do something. If I believe, he said, that DACA is wrong, pass a law; take care of the problem. He said that on September 5. Here we are in December, just days away from the end of the year, and we have done nothing—nothing. And what has happened?

Across America, these young people, their families, and the people who believe in them have begged us to step up and do something. They have said: In the name of justice, in the name of fairness, in the name of morality, do something. And we have done nothing—nothing.

Many of them have decided in desperation to bring their message here to the Capitol. Right now, as I stand and speak on the floor of the Senate, there are thousands outside on the Mall, roaming through the corridors, trying to stop people who they believe might be Congressmen or Senators, to beg for the passage of the Dream Act, to beg for the reinstatement of the DACA protection. Some of them have made great sacrifices. I have gone out to talk to a lot of them. They have never been to Washington before. They have never been inside this Capitol Building. They don't know what it means to lobby. They can't afford a lawyer or a lobbyist. They are coming here to beg for their lives and to beg for their families. Some people are shunning them, refusing to talk to them. Others are gracious and warm and welcoming. They get on people's nerves because there are a lot of them and they want to talk to people about solving the problem. Some of them have sat in our offices—even my office—and I understand it. As awkward as it may be, I welcome them. I want them to know what America is about—a place where people in this country have the right to speak, to assemble, to petition their government. They believe this is their government. They look at that flag and they say: That is my flag too.

Legally, they are wrong. They are undocumented. Many have no country at all to which they can turn.

Who are they? Who are these 780,000 young people? I can tell you who 900 of them are. Nine hundred of these undocumented young people stood up and took an oath to a country that will not legally recognize them to serve in our military and risk their lives for each and every one of us. What greater proof can we ask about their commitment to this country? Nine hundred of them did this. If we fail to provide DACA or Dream Act protection to them, these 900 will be forced to leave the military of the United States of America. They will be turned away, despite the fact that they have volunteered their lives for this country.

Twenty thousand of them teach in our classrooms around America. I have met many of them. They are teaching in inner city schools through a program called Teach For America, which sends them to some of the poorest school districts in America. They are spending their lives, as undocumented in America, trying to help the least of those of the population, those in desperate need of their assistance.

Among them are thousands who are going to school now and college. Let me tell you that their challenge in college is a heck of a lot harder than the challenge for most young people. They don't qualify for any Federal assistance to go to college—no Pell grants, no Federal loans. They have to go to work. They have to work and earn the money to pay for tuition. That is what their lives are all about.

So for those who would dismiss these as lazy people who really can't offer much to the future of America, take a minute to get to know them.

Yesterday, one of my Republican colleagues looked me in the eye and said: We are talking about amnesty; these are people who violated the law. You are talking about forgiving them for violating the law.

Some of them, by his definition, violated the law when they were carried in their mothers' arms to the United States at the age of 2. Does that sound right? Does that sound just? Does it sound fair to say that these are people who have broken the law in America? I don't think so.

Let me say a word about their parents. There are some people who say: OK, I don't hate the Dreamers, but I get to hate their parents, right? They did break the law.

Technically, they probably did. I will not argue the point, but I will tell you something. As a father, I would risk breaking the law for the life, future, and safety of my children. I would, and most people would, and they did. It wasn't for any selfish motive. It was so that their kids had a chance. That is what it was all about, and that is why they came to this country. They knew that at any minute it could fall apart and they would be asked to leave, or worse. They risked it for their children. So I am not going to stand in

moral judgment of these parents of Dreamers. As to legal judgment, the case is clear. But as to a moral judgment, no, I just will not do it.

What I have done 101 or 102 times is to come to this floor and just tell a story—a story about a Dreamer—so that people know who they are. Today I would like to tell you the story of this young lady whose name is Karen Reyes. Karen Reyes is the 104th Dreamer whom I have introduced on the floor of the Senate, brought to the United States from Mexico. She grew up in San Antonio. She had a childhood like other American kids—Girl Scouts, summer camps, church groups, volleyball. Karen didn't even know she was undocumented until she was in junior high school.

She was a good student. She graduated with honors from high school. She was a member of the marching band. Here is what she said about growing up in America:

I might be an undocumented American, but I am an American. I came to this country when I was 2 years old. The only recollection that I have of Mexico is when I visited as a young child. I have not gone back in 20 years. I grew up here. I formed a life here. I made friends here. I received my education here.

After high school, Karen went to San Antonio College and then transferred to the University of Texas San Antonio. She made the President's Honors List and the Dean's List.

She found time to volunteer at the University Health System and at the San Antonio Youth Literacy project. She tutored second grade students in reading, and she worked with communities and schools where she mentored and tutored elementary students.

In 2012, Karen graduated with a bachelor of arts in interdisciplinary studies. She went on to the Deaf Education and Hearing Science Program at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

In 2014, Karen graduated with a master's degree in deaf education and hearing science.

Today, she is working as a special education teacher in Austin, TX. Here is a picture of her with the kids. She teaches 3- and 4-year-old kids who are deaf or hard of hearing. She teaches kids with disabilities. Here is what she said about DACA, the program that was abolished by President Trump, which allows her to live in the United States and to work as a teacher:

DACA made me visible. DACA made it possible for me to teach children who are deaf and hard of hearing. I am helping these students and families on their journey to being able to communicate and achieve their dreams. Before I didn't think I had a voice, but now I do. . . . I get to change lives every single day.

Twenty thousand other DACA students and recipients like Karen are teachers in our schools. Because DACA was repealed, Texas stands to lose 2,000 teachers. I ask the State of Texas: Are you ready to lose Karen? Are you ready to lose 2,000 more just like her because

the Senate and the House of Representatives refused to act, refused to legislate, refused to provide protection to her?

As for Karen, her DACA expires in August of next year. This will be her last school year. If Congress doesn't step up and meet its responsibility and pass the Dream Act, her time teaching these deaf and hard of hearing children will come to an end.

In a few days we are going to go home and celebrate Christmas with our families. It is a big, important time of year. My wife and I are looking forward to it. We get to see all of the grandkids in one place. It is going to be pure bedlam, but we are going to love every second of it. Christmas means that much to our families. Being together means so much to our families.

Think for a moment about those who are protected with DACA. This may be their last Christmas in the United States. They don't know where they will be next Christmas because the President abolished the protection program and because Congress refuses to act. They don't know where they will be and they don't know whether they will be with family or not. That is the reality.

What a reflection on our Nation that we have reached this point to punish someone like Karen, a giving, caring, educated professional person who is spending time helping little boys and girls who desperately need her help.

Some in this Chamber—and I have seen them face to face—are ready to tell her to leave: We don't need you anymore, Karen. Go back to wherever you came from. Just get out of here. That is their attitude. It is not mine nor the majority of Americans.

Over three out of four Americans believe Karen deserves a chance. Over three out of four Americans believe she should be allowed to stay and earn her way to legal status and citizenship. Incidentally, 60 percent of those who voted for Donald Trump happen to believe that same thing.

But there are voices of division and fear and hatred in this administration. I have seen them. I have heard them. I know what they have to say. The question is, will they prevail? Will they define this President in terms of his treatment of people who are just asking for a chance to be part of America's future? The answer to that question is really not in the President's hands. It is in our hands. We owe it to these young people to do the right thing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I first thank our distinguished leader from Illinois, not only for his eloquence and passion but his unfettered commitment to the young people who were brought here as children, who maybe had never set foot in the country their parents came from and may not know the language. They are here, and a promise was made to them in our country.

I spoke yesterday on the floor about two young people from Michigan. We have 10,000 young people in Michigan—some serving in the military, some in jobs, some in school—who don't know any other country. They love our country, and they just want our country to keep its promise to them. That is what I view it as, keeping our promises. So I thank the Senator.

VETERANS DESERVE BETTER ACT

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I want to speak about keeping promises to a very important group of Americans as well; that is, our men and women who are serving us as veterans and serving us in the military.

Representing Michigan in the U.S. Senate is a great honor. I know it is for all of us. One of the best parts of the job is being able to work on behalf of Michigan's veterans.

From the Civil War to the World Wars, to the Korean war, to Vietnam, the Cold War, the Gulf war, and our fight against terrorism, Michigan's veterans have given us their all. Our veterans have always been the first in line to defend our democracy. That is why they should never be at the back of any line—for a job, healthcare, housing, or a world-class education.

Unfortunately, there are times when our veterans aren't getting the benefits they deserve, have earned, and have been promised. When that happens, it is our duty to fight for those who fought for us. That is why, in 2014, Congress passed something called the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, called the Veterans Choice Program.

This legislation aimed to reduce wait times and provide medical services to veterans in their communities after we heard of very serious issues and horrible situations that had occurred for veterans in some parts of our country.

The Veterans Choice Act was created to meet a real need—getting our veterans prompt healthcare in locations that are convenient for them. This program is especially critical for veterans in rural communities throughout Michigan as well as throughout the country—people in rural areas who were previously required to travel long distances, hours and hours, for services.

However, since it was enacted, providers across my State and in many parts of the country have not been getting paid, rural hospitals have pulled out, and this program in Michigan has not been working.

Worst of all, too many Michigan veterans and veterans across the country are struggling to get the appointments and the healthcare they need. That is why, last week, I introduced a bill I am calling the Veterans Deserve Better Act.

This bill will help our veterans in three ways to be able to correct what is occurring right now in Michigan with a private contractor—a private provider